

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2019

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



White-faced Heron fishing in Forest Creek,
- photo by Noel Young

2018 Annual Challenge Bird Count – Castlemaine birds

By Chris Timewell

Six groups of keen birdwatchers contributed to the Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club's involvement in the 2018 Annual Challenge Bird Count effort. Thanks to Kerrie, Jane, Lexie, Phil, Damian, Lynne, Abigail, Cheryl, Ron, Geraldine, Geoff, Nigel, Joy, Beth, Theo, Eleanor and 12 members of the Castlemaine Birdlife branch for their participation and excellent note-taking. Our annual involvement stretches back to 2001.

Held on the first weekend in December, a wide range of locations were visited including Castlemaine Botanic Gardens, Castlemaine Golf Course, Barkers Creek Reservoir, Sawmill / Muckleford Rd, Muckleford Railway Station/ Walmer Rd, Muckleford Forest north, Welshman's Reef, Red White and Blue Mine, Quince Tree, Gower Forest, Castlemaine town and Mount Tarrengower. With the owners' permission, private properties were also visited in Muckleford, Sutton Grange, Barkers Creek, Castlemaine, Baringhup and the Nuggetts.

From these searches, 108 different species were detected comprising 1818 individual birds. Breeding behaviour was also detected for nine species. These sightings have been submitted to the event organisers, and many of the bird observers also directly submitted their sightings into the national Birddata database. (This was very similar to the overall 2017 results, when we detected 107 species and 1701 individual birds).

Some of the highlights include:

- Golden-headed Cisticola (2), Tawny Frogmouth (2), Latham's Snipe (1) and Powerful Owls (2) at the Castlemaine Golf Course
- Golden-headed Cisticola (1) at the Barkers Creek Reservoir
- Rainbow Bee-eaters (5) in Baringhup
- Pied Cormorant (2) on a private waterbody in Muckleford
- Caspian Terns in Muckleford and at the Barkers Creek Reservoir
- Breeding Little Pied Cormorant at the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens
- Spotted Dove (2) in Muckleford area

Some of the species notable for their absences or low numbers include:

No sightings of Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos, Fan-tailed or Pallid Cuckoos, Diamond Firetails, flycatchers, Black-shouldered Kites, Varied Sittella, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Black-chinned or White-eared Honeyeater, Hooded Robin and Speckled Warblers.

Very few White-browed Babblers (one group of 4), Wedge-tailed Eagle (1), Brown Falcon (3), Grey Fantail (6), White-naped Honeyeater (1), Tree Martin (1), Scarlet Robin (2), Eastern Yellow Robin (3), Brown Thornbill (1), Striated Thornbill (1) and Jacky Winter (1).

The full list of sightings is shown in the table below.

As a tentative date for your diary, the 2019 annual count will be held on the first weekend in December again. However, I have not yet received notification from the BirdLife Australia organisers whether this means it will be held on Sat 30 Nov and Sun 1 Dec, or if it will be the weekend of 7-8 December.

Species Name	Total	Breeding	Species Name	Total	Breeding
Black Swan	4		Rufous Whistler	15	
Australian Shelduck	4		Superb Fairy-wren	43	
Australian Wood Duck	37		Spotted Pardalote	12	
Pacific Black Duck	19		Striated Pardalote	22	
Grey Teal	38		White-browed Scrubwren	4	
Hardhead	13		Weebill	13	
* Muscovy Duck	1		Brown Thornbill	1	
Australasian Grebe	25		Buff-rumped Thornbill	3	
Great Cormorant	7		Yellow Thornbill	7	
Pied Cormorant	2		Striated Thornbill	1	
Little Pied Cormorant	16	Yes	Red Wattlebird	25	
Little Black Cormorant	29		Noisy Miner	12	
Darter	5		Yellow-faced Honeyeater	10	
White-faced Heron	7		Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	10	
Australian White Ibis	8		White-plumed Honeyeater	22	
Straw-necked Ibis	10		Fuscous Honeyeater	13	
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	2		White-naped Honeyeater	1	
Great Egret	1		Brown-headed Honeyeater	9	
Australian Pelican	3		New Holland Honeyeater	9	Yes
Black Kite	1		Jacky Winter	1	
Whistling Kite	3		Scarlet Robin	2	
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1		Eastern Yellow Robin	3	
Little Eagle	1		White-browed Babbler	4	
Nankeen Kestrel	2		Crested Shrike Tit	2	
Brown Falcon	3		Grey Shrike Thrush	24	
Black-fronted Dotterel	6		Magpie-lark	14	
Latham's Snipe	1		Grey Fantail	6	

Species Name	Total	Breeding	Species Name	Total	Breeding
Purple Swamphen	2		Willie Wagtail	22	
Dusky Moorhen	5	Yes	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	15	
Eurasian Coot	119		White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	3	Yes
Masked Lapwing	70		White-winged Triller	2	
Caspian Tern	3		Olive-backed Oriole	2	
* Rock Dove	5		Dusky Woodswallow	17	
Common Bronzewing	7		White-browed Woodswallow	8	
Crested Pigeon	7		Australian Magpie	123	Yes
Peaceful Dove	9		Grey Currawong	1	
* Spotted Dove	2		Australian Raven	18	Yes
Galah	69		Little Raven	219	
Long-billed Corella	90		White-winged Chough	47	
Little Corella	2		Rufous Songlark	3	
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	18		Brown Songlark	1	
Musk Lorikeet	17		Austral Pipit	4	
Crimson Rosella	38		* House Sparrow	28	Yes
Eastern Rosella	41		Red-browed Finch	22	
Red-rumped Parrot	36		* European Goldfinch	2	Yes
Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo	4		Welcome Swallow	80	
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	1		Tree Martin	1	
Powerful Owl	2		Fairy Martin	42	
Laughing Kookaburra	14		Clamorous Reed-Warbler	9	Yes
Sacred Kingfisher	8		Golden-headed Cisticola	1	
Tawny Frogmouth	2		Silvereye	7	
Rainbow Bee-eater	5		* Common Blackbird	7	
Brown Treecreeper	5		* Common Starling	8	
White-throated Treecreeper	4		* Common Myna	5	

From your Committee

Membership fees for 2019-20 are due by 1st April

The **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** will be held on Friday 8th March. The agenda will include reports from our President and Treasurer, and election of the Committee for 2019-20. Nomination forms for all committee positions will be included with the March newsletter – please consider standing for election.

Our guest speaker for March will be Nigel Harland

who will illustrate his recent trip to Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda with some great photos.

Castlemaine Naturalist Newsletter

Deadline for articles for the April edition is by close of Friday 29th March

A Wombat Forest National Park?

Noel Young



The 'Wombat Forestcare' group are dedicated to documenting and preserving the biodiversity of the Wombat Forest. Most of it has been heavily logged in the past, leaving some remnants of old forest along waterways. Until the group became active over the last 10 to 15 years, there was almost no official data on the fauna of this area. Our February speaker Gayle Osborne outlined the work done by concentrating on three 'Vulnerable' species which have been documented by their efforts; the Brush-tailed Phascogale, Powerful Owl, and the Greater Glider.

Motion sensing night cameras focused on a bait container recorded the Phascogales along with other animals. Powerful Owls favour Blackwood trees, and have been found breeding, despite the competition for scarce large hollows and the low numbers of possums. A surprising number of Greater Gliders have been found – over 140 in 3 years, in various parts of the forest.

With the knowledge gained by this group they were able to influence the draft recommendations of VEAC which currently proposes a set of reserves centred on a National Park in the area. They have also influenced the positioning of control burns.

We thank Gayle for a fascinating look at a neighbouring but very different environment to our south.



Photos supplied by Gayle Osborne -
Greater Glider (top);
Brush-tailed Phascogale (above)
Powerful Owl with prey (right)

Field Trip to the Wombat Forest

Peter Turner

Following her talk at our February meeting, Gayle Osborne led our excursion on Saturday 9th to one of the sections of the Wombat Forest studied by Wombat Forestcare. On a cool morning with showers possible, 8 of us met Gayle and Trevor Speirs in Dayleford. Driving south on the Ballan Rd, we turned off at Back Settlement Rd and on to a spot on Farm Rd, where our guides stopped. At the edge of the road was a low bush – the rare *Bossiaea vomkata*, found only in the Wombat Forest. Not flowering in February, of course, and easy to overlook, but up close the flat blue-green leafless branches are striking. Further along, we walked up a side track to find a few more, and a completely different relative, ground covering *Bossiaea cordigera* with tiny leaves. We then drove on to an area that has not been logged since about 1900, to wonder at the towering Messmates, *Eucalyptus obliqua*, and very tall Backwoods, *Acacia melanoxylon*. Near Musk Creek, as tributary of the Werribee River, in a moister habitat, there were Victorian Christmas Bush *Prostanthera lasianthos* and Musk Daisy-bush *Olearia angophilla*, and Gayle found one Turquoise Berry, *Drymophila cyanocarpa*. We returned to Daylesford via Bullarto, passing through part of the forest where the regrowth after logging was much younger. Thanks to Gayle and Trevor for a most interesting and informative afternoon in this very special part of “The Wombat”. We were invited to return during the winter when fungi will be abundant!



Bossiaea vomkata

Left - as we saw it
(photo by Noel Young)

and right – flowering in spring
(photo by Gayle Osborne)



“Wildlife” observations 1940

George Broadway

Apparently the readers of “Wildlife” had not been very active over the 1939-1940 summer period as there were very few specimens sent in for identification. They were however as follows:-

Port Melbourne: Slender Ichneumon Fly. Not a true fly but a relative of ants, bees and wasps. Has a slender “waist” and a “sting” set an angle to the tail end; this is actually an egg-laying organ which is used to inject eggs into the body of a caterpillar. The young then eat the body of the living caterpillar. In this way the ichneumon is a very useful insect, helping to control other insect pests.

Glenferrie: Attid or jumping spider. They may be small but they attract attention by way of their brilliant colours and their jumping ability, rivalling that of fleas. The eyes are also very large and brilliantly coloured

Elliminyt: Chrysalis of a butterfly but difficult to say which one. Probably a brown.

Barmera: A beetle, 4 cm long and 1.7 cm across the back. Wing covers bright yellow with the middle section a light wine colour and the head an iridescent green. Underneath liberally marked with a peacock blue. A Jewel Beetle, its name is *Stigmodera*.

Bondi Junction: Emilie Mudge-Bates writes; I have noticed scores of times that the wood from trees which have been struck by lightning will not burn; it simply smoulders black. I have seen gum, box, and Red Gum which have been struck and in turn tried to light the splinters among non-struck wood in an open fireplace but failed. I have asked dozens of men of the land and they all agree that it will not burn. (Have any of our members had experience with similar timber ?)

Mr Charles French, former Govt. Entomologist of Victoria: In my garden today White Butterflies *Pieris rapae*. were very numerous on the flowers of Lantana. (Remember that these pests had only been introduced about 12 months previously). He continues; This recent introduction is likely to become a serious pest to Victorian vegetable growers. I feel sure that the various hymenopterous insects, (wasps, ichneumons, etc.,) will assist in keeping them in check.

(Recent observations suggest that the caterpillars are in fact being parasitized by wasps, but whether this is enough to save my cabbages is doubtful)

Balwyn: Black fungus resembling a group of round stemless mushrooms, but with spores rising from the outer surface instead of from within and as hard as a cricket ball. Usually known as the Soot Fungus. Lives on dead, decaying wood. (I asked Google about this but Google could only tell me about Sooty Mould. Perhaps one of our readers may be able to help)

I have just finished reading a book called “The Birdman’s Wife”, which is about Elizabeth Gould, the wife of John Gould.

It was reported that at the 1940 AGM of the Gould League an enlarged portrait of Elizabeth Gould was presented to the League by Mrs Helen Edelsten, the granddaughter of Elizabeth Gould. It was agreed to hang the portrait in the Victorian Education Department.

In the article she was referred to as “Mrs John Gould”, but in the book she was

Elizabeth Gould. She is now being recognised as the skilled artist responsible for the many beautiful bird portraits in her husbands book. All this while producing eight children.

In this issue is also an article by Alec Chisholm describing how he visited the Gould granddaughter, Mrs Helen Edelston of London who had the original of a portrait of Eliza of which she sent a copy to the Gould League.

She was able to refer him to her sons, both doctors, who were able to provide many papers, letters, etc. From these much information regarding Eliza and John Gould was obtained. Previously we did not even know her name. I expect that this material has been utilised by the author of "The Birdman's Wife". It seems that to the family she was Eliza.

I am amused when rose breeders graciously name one of their roses after their wives, for example Mrs Fred Danks. Does she not have a name of her own? Seems to me that this is actually naming the rose after oneself.

A copy of the portrait was reproduced on page 33 of the Feb. issue but sad to say, in my mutilated copy page 33 has been removed.

The Birds of Sutton Grange

Nigel Harland

I have been producing this list for a few months now, but this is the longest list by far. We had a fellow birdwatcher stay with us for a few days, so we spent a fair time on the back veranda with binoculars – that may have something to do with it.

Superb Fairy-wren	Red-browed Finch	White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Magpie	Australian Raven	Laughing Kookaburra
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Brown Falcon	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Long-billed Corella	Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella
Striated Pardalote	Spotted Pardalote	Grey Shrike-thrush
White-faced Heron	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Tree Martin
New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow	Nankeen Kestrel
Red-browed Finch	Red-rumped Parrot	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Red Wattlebird	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Common Bronzewing
Brown Goshawk	White Ibis	Striated Thornbill
House Sparrow	Common Blackbird	Fuscous Honeyeater
Masked Lapwing	Grey Currawong	White-throated Treecreeper
White-winged Chough	Little Raven	Rainbow Bee Eater

An odd behaviour in birds

Geraldine Harris

During the warmer months, on several occasions I have noticed White-plumed Honeyeaters and then Magpies land and prostrate themselves on the ground in a garden bed with their wings spread wide. They stayed in this position for a few minutes then stood up and flew off. Various explanations for this behaviour called "sunning" include: cooling down by exposing their feathers; using the sun's warmth or the formic acid smell of ants on the ground to kill parasites; to generate Vitamin D from the bird's preen oil; or perhaps purely for pleasure (birdlife.com.au).

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri March 8 meeting: AGM and speaker NIGEL HARLAND on “Travels in Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda”

Fri April 12 Meeting: speaker EUAN MOORE - Bird Surveys around Innamincka

Fri May 10 Meeting: speaker CHRIS TZAROS on Turquoise Parrots

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2019

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2018 Committee

President:	George Broadway	5472 2513
Secretary:	Peter Turner	5470 6891
Treasurer:	Geoff Harris	0418 392183

Sue Albert	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Dianne Thompson	Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345

[email newsletter material to: noelyoung@outlook.com.au]

**Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B**